

Anthrax Alert

(11/00)

Guidelines for Mail Sorters

What is Anthrax?

Anthrax is a disease caused by a bacterium (*Bacillus anthracis*). This naturally-occurring bacterium has received a great deal of attention recently because of the deliberate exposure of individuals who have sorted or opened contaminated mail. It is harmful only if a sufficient dose is inhaled (breathed in), ingested (swallowed), or gets into an open cut or wound. **Anthrax is not contagious! It cannot be spread from person to person (e.g., by coughing or sneezing).**

No anthrax exposures have been documented in Washington or in any surrounding western states, nor has there been a credible threat of exposure to employees handling mail. **However, this information is being provided to help you in the event of a bioterrorism incident.**

Guidelines for Mail Sorters:

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has developed interim guidelines for mail sorters because of the threat posed by bioterrorism, the full document can be found at www.bt.cdc.gov. The following minimum personal protective equipment and practices may be used to reduce the risk of exposure during mail sorting:

- **Respiratory protection:** A disposable face mask rated N-95 or better. Replace mask per manufacturers recommendation. Information on respiratory protection can be found at www.lni.wa.gov/wisha/p-ts/RespiratoryProtection
Note: The functioning of these masks is compromised on persons with facial hair.
- **Skin protection:** Powder free, disposable vinyl or nitrile gloves. Replace at every break and end of the day or whenever torn. **Clothing:** "street clothes" with long sleeves, fitted at cuff.
- **Hand washing:** Wash hands with soap and water after removing gloves.
- **Disposal:** Face masks and gloves can be disposed of in garbage bags, sealed, and placed in the regular garbage.
- **Laundering:** Launder personal clothing or uniforms with commercially available laundry detergent and water or dry clean.

If a Suspicious Package is found:

- Set the item down gently, preferably on a flat surface, and leave it undisturbed.
- Evacuate and secure the area.
- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water.
- Remove and gently double bag any visibly contaminated clothing.
- Notify your supervisor or call 911 to report the incident.
- Record names of those who may have been exposed to the contents of the package, or to contaminated clothing.
- In the event that the material is determined to contain anthrax spores, exposed persons should be evaluated for treatment by a physician. **There are effective treatments available to prevent disease.**